

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR BUDGET HEARING
February 15, 2006

I want to welcome everybody here today for our first hearing of the year, which is also the first hearing in Congress to bring together all the research agencies that will be participating in the American Competitiveness Initiative.

It's a rare thing to think of a budget hearing as a time of celebration, but I think that that's how we should view this morning's proceedings. For a long time, many of us have been calling for a renewed emphasis on research in the physical sciences – a commitment that would be demonstrated not with rhetorical feints, but with genuine investments.

Perhaps more importantly, the nation's leaders in industry and higher education have been calling for such an investment because they see it as a “must” if the United States is to retain its competitive edge. One might say that there has been a “gathering storm” of lobbying on this subject, as an increasing number of leaders have issued thundering statements about the need to rethink our research and education and energy policies.

But now that storm can abate a bit – or at least blow over to Capitol Hill – because in the Executive Branch our words have been heard and they have been heeded. And I want especially to thank Dr. Marburger and Secretary Bodman for their tireless efforts to bring the American Competitiveness Initiative into being. I have to say to Secretary Bodman that I don't think I ever seen a cabinet officer have such an immediate, visible and positive impact on a department.

Now it's our job in Congress to follow through. And I think we will. I know that everyone on this Committee will be devoted to that effort. We have already been in contact with our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, and Chairman Wolf and Chairman Hobson share our enthusiasm – which should come as no surprise given their longstanding positions on science funding. We all understand that the future employment and prosperity of the American people are at stake.

On this Committee, we will also pass and enact whatever authorizing legislation will help make the proposed funding a reality both this year and in years to come, and whatever legislation will help ensure that any additional funds are spent as wisely as possible. We are currently reviewing all the ideas that have been offered up around this town, as well as our own, and we will develop bipartisan legislation on funding, education and energy.

But I don't want to pass bills that are laundry lists of new or duplicative programs that will never come into being. I want to focus on a few key ideas and programs that will help promote and wisely use additional appropriations. And I'm sure that we'll be working more publicly on all of this next month.

In developing legislation and a hearing agenda, we will be looking at the Advanced Energy Initiative as well as the American Competitiveness Initiative. The energy initiative is just as important and just as promising as the effort to increase research funding in the basic sciences.

But I remain concerned that our nation still lacks a sensible energy policy, and we need to get beyond the illusion that pouring money into technology development – which we need to do – is enough to transform our energy portfolio. The market will not adequately value the collective need to become more energy independent before prices become intolerable. So the energy initiative is a necessary, but hardly sufficient step in the right direction.

Now while today's hearing is a celebration, I don't want to leave the impression that there are no problems with the proposed budget. I expect that Mr. Gordon won't leave that impression anyway. But I do have concerns, such as the inadequate funding for education programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF). But we can get to those in questions and in other statements, and I won't belabor those points now.

I think it's important that our main message this morning be one of victory because we need to communicate that message to our colleagues to turn the American Competitiveness Initiative into reality. We're not going to "declare victory and go home." Rather, we need to think of it this way: we've won the battle, now it's time to win the war.

I look forward to working with today's witnesses and with all my colleagues to do just that. Thank you.